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15 March 2019

Mrs Eleanor Hatchett  
Headteacher  
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Berkshire  
RG2 7AY

Dear Mrs Hatchett

### **Special measures monitoring inspection of Phoenix College**

Following my visit to your school on 26 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions that have been taken since the school's recent section 5 inspection.

The inspection was the first monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection that took place in November 2018.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

The local authority's statement of action is fit for purpose.

The school's improvement plan is fit for purpose.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the interim executive board (IEB), the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Reading. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Hubbard  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

## **Annex**

### **The areas for improvement identified during the inspection that took place in November 2018.**

- Urgently review and sharpen safeguarding processes so that:
  - the role of the designated safeguarding lead is clearly understood by leaders and staff
  - all adults know what to do if they have a concern about a pupil
  - leaders systematically record concerns and communications about pupils' well-being, and document their decisions and actions appropriately
  - leaders ensure that appropriate safeguarding and staffing checks are completed before pupils attend alternative education off-site.
- Improve the quality of leadership and management and governance by ensuring that:
  - a sustainable and effective leadership, governance and staffing structure is in place
  - leaders use the newly introduced systems to monitor the progress of pupils effectively, including disadvantaged pupils and the most able, so that it is clear what teaching and additional support is working and what is not
  - pupils access a broad, balanced and appropriate curriculum, well suited to their needs
  - all subject leaders are fully accountable and develop the necessary skills to enable them to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching in their subjects
  - leaders reliably analyse information about pupils' behaviour and attendance to inform their actions to bring about improvement
  - additional funding to support disadvantaged pupils is used effectively to improve the progress and outcomes of this group
  - staff receive appropriate training and support so that they have the necessary skills and resources to manage pupils' behaviour effectively
  - leaders, including governors, rigorously evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of any alternative education arrangements
  - all pupils access their entitlement to full-time education.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils, including the most able and those who are disadvantaged, make consistently good progress in all aspects of learning, by ensuring that:
  - all staff have high expectations for all pupils' behaviour and achievement, including the most able

- teachers have reliable subject knowledge in the subjects they teach
  - teachers make effective use of information, from their assessment of pupils' progress, to provide suitably challenging teaching that builds on pupils' prior learning and matches their needs
  - teaching assistants rapidly develop a clear, successful and consistent role in supporting pupils' learning.
- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare, by ensuring that:
- pupils attend school regularly
  - the newly introduced policies and procedures for managing pupils' behaviour are understood by all staff and followed consistently
  - staff undertake thorough risk assessments for managing pupils' behaviour and for taking pupils off-site
  - all bullying, racist or homophobic incidents are accurately recorded, acted upon by leaders, and evaluated to inform future provision.

An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers.

## **Report on the first monitoring inspection on 26 February 2019**

### **Evidence**

Her Majesty's Inspector observed the school's work. She also met separately with the headteacher, members of the IEB, including the chair, staff responsible for safeguarding, those overseeing attendance, a group of staff, a representative from the local authority and the designated officer for the local authority (LADO). Observations in class were carried out in the morning and afternoon. In addition, Her Majesty's Inspector scrutinised documents, including records of safety checks made on staff, the post-Ofsted action plan and the revised local authority statement of action.

During this inspection, the areas of improvement relating to leadership capacity, safeguarding, behaviour, personal development and welfare were focused upon.

### **Context**

The deputy headteacher stood down after the last inspection and is no longer in post. A new deputy headteacher has been appointed and will take up the post after Easter. Both assistant headteachers are currently off sick. Three teaching assistants, the head of English and a class teacher are also currently absent from school. The school bursar, who was a member of the senior leadership team, has retired and the post has yet to be filled.

The headteacher has taken on the role of designated safeguarding lead and special educational needs coordinator.

The school has started the process of becoming an academy and is currently consulting with potential sponsors.

### **The effectiveness of leadership and management**

The headteacher has worked tirelessly since the previous inspection to improve the school. Some specific areas identified in the previous inspection report are now better. For example, all pupils are now in full-time education, and safeguarding records are more systematically updated. However, there are significant weaknesses in the capacity of the staff team due the absence of staff, including senior leaders, and also some poor practice. These weaknesses have resulted in some planned improvements not being actioned or not having the intended impact. For example, leaders reintegrated pupils attending alternative provision as planned, but capacity issues mean that this group's very challenging behaviour is not well managed. Some of this group's behaviour is having a very negative effect on other pupils. The turbulent staffing situation, including the use of supply staff, has also contributed to a general decline in pupils' conduct, especially in lessons. On occasion, pupils' behaviour is dangerous and places other pupils and staff at risk.

The improvement plans developed by the school are generally effective because they are detailed and relate to the areas for development identified in the inspection report. There is evidence that IEB members and the headteacher are using the plans to monitor the pace and impact of improvements. However, the success criteria in some areas are written more clearly than others. For example, the criteria in the leadership section are succinct and include measurable outcomes. Insufficient emphasis is placed on recruiting a stable team of staff as a matter of urgency. The revised local authority statement of action is also fit for purpose. It now includes timescales that have been carefully considered to allow for actions to become embedded over time. The plan needs editing to make sure that any typos are corrected as they could cause confusion.

Some aspects of safeguarding have improved. Each pupil referred to external agencies has a file which includes a detailed chronology of actions taken, significant events and communications with agencies. These files are carefully reviewed by the designated lead. The chair of the IEB also checks to see if the files are up to date and well ordered. At present, any safeguarding concerns that are raised by staff are formally recorded and followed through, although these records are not currently included in pupils' safeguarding files. The school recognises that to include the records in pupils' safeguarding files would be a useful next step so that the designated lead can gain a full and detailed picture of all concerns over time. However, other aspects of safeguarding are not as effective and there is evidence that they have deteriorated since the previous inspection.

The school environment is not always safe for pupils and staff. This is because some pupils' behaviour is dangerous. For instance, during the inspection a pupil climbed over a very high fence onto the roof of a garage belonging to a property next to the school to retrieve a ball, despite a teacher requesting him not do so. By doing this he put himself at risk. Some pupils also place their classmates and staff in danger. Records show a worryingly high proportion of incidents in which pupils have physically assaulted their peers and/or members of staff. The records also indicate that pupils have brought dangerous objects, such as lighters, into school.

The school has successfully updated risk assessments for visits. Updates on pupils' individual risk assessments are inconsistent. For some this process has worked well and there is evidence of teachers usefully amending them, so they include new risks and guidance on how staff should respond to them. However, some incidents of risky behaviour have not been updated on individual risk assessments, even when they have been serious. Not enough thought has been given to how this process will be implemented so that it is manageable, bearing in mind the current frequency of serious incidents.

The IEB is making a strong contribution to improving some aspects of the school. There is significant educational and therapeutic expertise within the board. In the short term this expertise is sensibly being used to bolster capacity, with members of the board training staff and taking on a supervisory role with therapists and key

workers. The IEB astutely recognises that their involvement at such an operational level in the school is an interim measure. Minutes from meetings, together with the IEB action plan, show that members of the board are also offering challenge and holding leaders to account. Their checks on safeguarding procedures, especially on record-keeping and the follow-up actions suggested, have led to improvements. The IEB has commissioned a review of pupil premium funding, which is scheduled for March 2019.

### **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

The quality of teaching learning and assessment was not a focus for this visit. In several classes, especially in Years 8 and 9, highly disruptive behaviour means that pupils are not learning. In some classes, pupils were not given any resources to assist them in their learning. In these classes, pupils were extremely disengaged. Teaching was more effective where teachers had thought about the knowledge and skills that they wanted pupils to learn and how they might best learn them, and when they provided resources that were suitable.

### **Personal development, behaviour and welfare**

The headteacher, in close collaboration with support staff, has successfully strengthened the way the school works with pupils who are absent, and with their families. Pupils now receive a home visit on the third day of absence to check on their safety as well as to encourage them to return to school. This approach has had a positive impact with some pupils and their attendance has improved. Unfortunately, when compared with the same period last year, attendance overall has declined, and is extremely low at 63%. This is, in part, due to the very low attendance of a small number of pupils, but it is also due to pupils who previously attended alternative provision struggling to reintegrate back into this school.

Although aspects of personal development and welfare have improved, the atmosphere in school is not positive, and periods of calm are not sustained. Lack of capacity at all levels means that the headteacher spends a lot of time dealing with serious incidents rather than implementing more strategic approaches to preventing poor behaviour. It also means that there are marked differences in the expectations of behaviour that staff have, with some staff tolerating behaviours that others do not.

In a number of classes, pupils' behaviour is extremely disruptive, and no learning takes place as a result. The atmosphere is particularly unsettled in the afternoons. During the inspection several pupils were running amok during the afternoon, including gaining entry into other classrooms in order to disrupt learning. For instance, one pupil entered another class and emptied the entire waste bin over the floor. Some temporary staff who take classes in the absence of permanent staff are not able to deal with the extremely challenging behaviour displayed by pupils. Some

existing staff do not always follow approaches outlined in pupils' individual risk assessments. Behaviour records show that some pupils repeatedly disrupt learning, and despite receiving sanctions their behaviour shows no sign of improvement. Staff diligently record incidents of poor behaviour using an online system. They also record any incidents of racial or homophobic bullying. There is currently not enough capacity in the leadership team for information from behaviour records to be analysed effectively. As a result, teachers and leaders tend to respond to poor behaviour after it happens. Not enough work is currently undertaken to support pupils in managing their own behaviour and making better choices.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

Outcomes were not a focus in this inspection. However, in classes, such as science, where teaching and behaviour are particularly weak, pupils are not learning and therefore are not making any progress.

### **External support**

The local authority is providing considerable support for the school in a number of different areas, including by supporting business management. This support has increased in response to the poor capacity in the current staff team, with local authority advisers helping teachers with planning on a weekly basis. Local authority leaders recognise there has been a decline in behaviour at the school and are aware that some pupils' behaviour is very challenging. They have rightly sought to strengthen capacity in the staff team by recruiting staff with relevant experience, but despite their efforts they have not managed to do so.

In order to improve the safety of pupils and staff, leaders must urgently ensure that:

- behaviour in class, and around school, improves rapidly, and there is a reduction in the number of incidents in which pupils place themselves and those around them in danger.